

Class Size

Reducing class size to below 20 students leads to higher student achievement. This is particularly true in kindergarten, first, second and third grades.

U.S. Department of Education, 1998

The above and following were stated in May, 1998, as part of a very comprehensive research document that was released by the U.S. Department of Education called: *Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know*. Analysis of twenty years of research on class size found the pattern of research findings points more and more clearly toward the beneficial effect of reducing class size.

The following are the findings:

- A consensus of research indicates that class size reduction in the early grades (kindergarten through third) leads to higher student achievement.
- The most significant effects of class size reduction on student achievement appear when class size is reduced to between 15 and 20 students.
- The greatest results were achieved when the teacher workload was reduced to under 20 rather than the adding of associates to larger classrooms.
- The related student achievement moves the average student from the 50th percentile up to somewhere above the 60th percentile. For disadvantaged and minority student the effects are somewhat larger.
- Student, teacher, and parents all report positive effects from the impact of class size reduction on the quality of classroom activity.
- The focus on the early grades suggests that smaller classes represent a preventative, rather than a remedial approach.
- Teachers will need professional development opportunities to optimize the potential benefits of smaller classes.
- While research indicates that class size reduction leads to higher student achievement, it must also be recognized that the quality of instruction plays a major role. Ongoing professional development for teachers will maximize student achievement results.

Tennessee's Project STAR is the most cited long-term research on class size. It found children in small classes outperformed students in larger classes in both reading and math on the Stanford Achievement Test. Students in small K–3 classes had better high school graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and were more likely to enroll in post secondary education.

“Small classes in early primary grades benefit students and provide a basis for substantial education reform without necessarily requiring massive infusions of funds. Consider some potential cost saving from using small classes in grades K-3:

- Fewer retentions
- Less need for remediation and/or special education
- Improved behavior
- Increased achievement” (Achilles, 1996)

Benefits of Smaller Classes

Benefits to the student in a smaller class:

1. Each student receives a larger portion of the educational resources represented by the teacher’s instructional time.
2. There is more time for each student to contribute while other listen.
3. Students develop better relationships with their classmates and with their teacher.
4. Students receive more individualized attention.

Benefits shared by teachers, administrators and parents:

1. Classroom atmosphere is improved.
2. Teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments.
3. Enhanced instruction and assessment:
 - * More time to spend in small group
 - * More time for individualized instruction
 - * More time for child-centered practices
 - * Greater opportunity to cover more material in greater depth

References

- Achilles, C. M. (1996). Students achieve more in smaller classes. *Educational Leadership* 53(5), 76-77.
- Tennessee's Project STAR (Sept. 1999). The Education Digest.
- U.S. Department of Education. (May 1998). *Reducing class size: What do we know?* Washington, DC: ERIC Document. (Reproduction Service No. ED 420-108).